



Axis Gallery

"Anonymity (Translation)" by Joe Amrhein is among the works now exhibited through Oct. 30 at Axis Gallery.

REVIEW

Axis Gallery keeps exhibit all in the family Amrhein

BY JULIA COUZENS
Special to The Bee

Bogus botanical drawings, quivering arrays of paint, black as soot, and a witty compilation of hand-painted forgeries are just some of the ingredients in this smart and tasty mix of work at Axis Gallery.

"Triad" is a three-person show organized by longtime Sacramento artist Phil Amrhein. The conceptually coherent and visually appealing show also includes works by his son, Justin, and brother, Joe, both based in Brooklyn. All three artists were born in Sacramento and attended local high schools, after which their paths diverged.

I'm not sure there's a distinct "look" to the art of the Sacramento region, but there is a preponderance of painterly figuration, event-laden compositions and high color. Such is not the case with the Amrheins' work, and this show of lean, spare and elegant work is truly a refreshing infusion of aesthetic fresh air. The Amrhein trio works primarily within the traditions of drawing and painting. And in differing ways, their work interrogates how we comprehend or experience belief.

Justin Amrhein's prints and drawings are intricately drawn and painted schematics of wholly invented botanical/mechanical entities that have the look of scholarly truth and purpose. "Mechanical

Orchid Triptych" (2014) comprises three 10-color screen prints that chart, dissect and deconstruct bionic orchids — hybrids of plant life that appear to sprout from and be part of entirely plausible machinery. The linearly intricate maps, blueprints, nautical charts and botanical drawings are extraordinarily beautiful as abstractions.

The convincing science fictions pose questions about the veracity of data. Justin Amrhein carefully hand-letters explanatory text to identify each component and function and insert anecdotal commentary.

The deceptive simplicity of Phil Amrhein's abstract paintings on paper is the perfect foil to the complexities of the other two Amrheins' work. For several years Phil has used black to create monochromatic evocations of space and feeling. In this current untitled work, he sprays mostly black paint into ineffable, hovering shapes, stripped down to color, light and atmosphere. The work becomes a *tabula rasa* for deep reverie and feeling.

These works on paper ask us to unpack our expectations of what is required to make a picture, and to experience the sensation of feeling and belief that can't be proved or attached to an object, image, or word. However, the work requires space so that we may encounter it with the same focus from which it was made.

Noted New York gallerist and Brooklyn artist Joe Amrhein has long used hand-painted lettering and signage to create densely layered graphic works that question the validity of knowledge. Early in his career he supported himself with sign-painting. He invigorates this disappearing craft with the same delicacy and precision that we value in the depiction of pictorial images. Amrhein manipulates letters and texts as both visual and verbal codes. We read them as words as well as receive them as images.

"Forgery" is a droll and technically skilled commentary on identity and cultural politics. Working on found surfaces such as scraps of wood, book and

Triad — Joe Amrhein, Justin Amrhein and Phillip Amrhein

When: Noon-5 p.m.
Fridays-Sundays through Oct. 30

Where: Axis Gallery, 625 S St., Sacramento

Cost: Free

Information:
axisgallery.org

record album covers, he craftily reproduces and amplifies the signatures of historical and contemporary figures. Miles Davis' signature is painted on the back of one of his albums. Leo Tolstoy's signature is painted with drop shadows on plexiglass and paper. John Hancock's signature is painted on Mylar-type material. Each signature is a carefully observed, formally exquisite component of this tour de force piece.